

Easter Sermon - April 16, 2017

Alleluia Christ is risen, we exclaim. Yet, curiously, and engagingly, the New Testament assigns no specific *moment* to the resurrection. “The first day of the week, the women, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, went to the tomb.....” But that’s not the day or time of the resurrection. That’s the beginning of our taking in of what’s *already happening*. If cameras were invented, no one could make a picture of the resurrection. You could make a film, with many photo-shoots, of events leading to the cross. It’s been done many times- with the marches, betrayals, suppers, and confrontation with Pilate. You could photograph the cross, but not the resurrection. The best you could show would be an empty tomb.

The resurrection begins with an empty space. Silence..... All the gospels mention the empty tomb. The two Marys walk down the road on the morning of the first day of the week. They were expecting to do the rites of burial- the work of grieving- to anoint the body of the one who had given them hope and purpose, to say good-bye to the one who had invited them into fellowship and given them life. He had been done in, executed, and crucified by the authorities.

And where they expected a gray rock at the end of the road, they found an open space. Where they expected darkness, light. Where they expected an anointing of the past and the powers of death, they found a blessing of the future. AND an immediate Presence: the earth quaking, a new road opening. The Holy One in whom we live and move and have our being, whose breath moves over the waters of creation, who leads through the desert to lands of promise, IS HERE, has always been here. The God of creation is more human than we are, absorbs our losses and betrayals and washes them away.

The women began to realize- and we may too- Jesus’ gift of love in embodying our human situation-through crucifixion and beyond- God’s *full presence* in loss, and new life.

So what are we to do? What then shall we do? First stand in awe, and gratitude. Then, how to follow in faith? We too are invited to go with the women to the tomb-where all our losses, our tragedies and trivialities, are laid out. Lay them out. Let them lie there. But don’t brood on them. Give them to God. Give them to God again and again. God in Christ absorbs them. Take in the stillness and

open space of the tomb. The space is open, but not empty. It's filled with God's love, and life. If you and I feel a little shaky and uncertain about this, so were the women on the first day of the new week, at the beginning of new life. They left trembling, with fear and joy, to find the others who were sharing their experience.

And that's another way the Bible instructs us on how to follow. The women, then the disciples, gathered to let the resurrection unfold in prayers and meals in the weeks, months and years to come. It wasn't a private affair. They needed each other. Sometimes they were surprised- like on the road to Emmaus, when breaking bread in the evening and someone else was present.

Where, and with whom is your resurrection community? Where is the place you can bring your sorrows and lay them down, and wait....with others, in hope, wait in re-assurance that God is moving- have a heart and hand opened to you to lead you down the road?

Last week, I was invited to be present at the birthing of twins, one of whom had died after 21 weeks in utero. Members of our parish know this account, which the mother has readily shared. She carried both twins, carefully monitored at Maine Med in Portland until the birth. The mother asked that both children be blessed; and the one who died baptized. The mother's parents, the grandparents, were there. Her husband was there. The nurses were nearby. I read the words. "We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit." Seldom have I experienced Easter, or an Easter community, so all at once.

For most of us Easter will unfold more slowly- a sign here or there, an unexpected grace at dinner, or a conversation over coffee, or a walk in the morning with daffodils coming up. Mary, we hear, in a wonderful image, had a hold of Jesus' foot. What a wonderful image. We can't grasp the whole thing, the whole person. Christ is bigger and beyond. We have a partial grip, and a first footstep down the road. Alleluia, Christ is risen. Let us rejoice and follow.